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ABSTRACT

This paper reviews the literature on parental involvement and covers four basic activity areas intended to foster parent participation in the schools: (1) volunteerism; (2) parent school communication; (3) parent education or training; and (4) policy-making. The authors summarize and analyze the objectives and methodologies of the research in each category, critically evaluating the findings and discussing the implications for educators. They conclude that considerably more attention needs to be paid to stating clear objectives and to precise measurement and evaluation of parent programs. Without careful development, evaluation, and dissemination of sound parental participation programs, there will be a proliferation of programs with vague objectives and untested assumptions that will not succeed and will only lead to greater disenchantment of school personnel and parents with each other. (Author/DS)

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PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT IN THE SCHOOLS:

TOWARDS WHAT END?

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Parental Involvement in the Schools:

Towards What End?

Within the educational literature, frequent calls are made for more parental involvement in the schools. Educators and psychologists accept that a strong relationship exists between home environment and school functioning (Eells, 1974; Dinkmeyer, 1973; Karnes & Zehrbach, 1975; McIntire & Payne, 1971; Landsberger, 1975; Boren & Jagodzinski, 1973). Increasingly they assert that if optimal education is to be achieved parents must be involved in their children's education (Larrick, 1976; Gilmore, 1974; Popp, 1973; Moore, 1973; Pellegrino, 1973; Abbott, 1973; Cooke & Appolini, 1975). Some authors further emphasize the importance of parental involvement and suggest that the school bears the major responsibility for establishing good relationships with parents and for involving them in their children's education (Zwick, 1974; Samuels, 1973; Karnes & Zehrbach, 1975; Nelson & Bloom, 1973).

To foster parental involvement, educators point to numerous activities in which parents can engage. These activities can be categorized into four basis areas: (a) volunteerism, (b) parent-school communications, (c) parent training or parent education, and (d) policy making. This paper critically reviews the educational literature in each of these areas, with primary emphasis on summarizing and conceptualizing the objectives and methodologies of each

category, critically evaluating the findings and discussing the implications for educators.

Volunteerism

The educational literature clearly outlines a number of benefits of involving parents in the school through their participation in volunteer activities (Adkins, 1975; Cory, 1974; Popp, 1973; Cooke & Appolini, 1975; Eells, 1974; Yawkey & Silvern, 1975; Nelson & Bloom, 1973). These benefits are often the objectives for volunteer programs:

Benefits to Parents

1. Teaching methods and better child management techniques can can be learned by watching the teacher at work.
2. Personal fulfillment can be gained.
3. Negative attitudes towards school can be reduced.

Benefits to the School

1. Extra manpower can be provided and teachers can be freed from performing non-professional tasks.
2. Personal attention to students can be provided by reducing the adult-pupil ratio.
3. The school program can be enriched through the volunteers' resources and talents.
4. Volunteers can help gather more support in the community for school programs.

Karnes and Zehrbach (1975) suggest that a possible negative effect of volunteerism may occur when parents are given menial jobs to

perform. They suggest that parents may develop negative attitudes which result in a resistance to further involvement. Adkins (1975), Pellegrino (1973), and Zwick (1974) also caution against using parents to perform tasks no one else wants to do.

In addition to specifying the benefits of volunteerism, the literature also contains a wide-ranging set of methods by which these benefits can be achieved. Authors suggest that parents can participate in both supportive activities, e.g., patrolling halls, repairing and shelving books, and chaperoning student social events (Cory, 1974; Nelson & Bloom, 1974; Eells, 1974), and in educational activities, e.g., checking classwork, tutoring students, and manning homework centers (Adkins, 1975; Dougherty & Dyal, 1976; Gold & Taylor, 1975; Myers & Massey, 1975).

While the literature on volunteer activities lists the benefits of volunteerism and the methods for achieving the benefits, it is noticeably lacking in two other areas: (a) reporting measurable outcomes; and (b) evaluating the effects of volunteer activities on the attitudes, behavior, and/or academic achievement of students, parents, teachers, and administration. The Greenwood, Breivogel, and Bessent (1972) study reported that 7% of approximately 83,000 parents interviewed in conjunction with the Florida Follow Through program worked in the classroom as volunteers. The study did not report, however, on any of the effects of this increased manpower. Karnes and Zehrbach (1975), in their article reviewing parental attitudes and behavior,

concluded that there is little strong data supporting the idea that parental involvement in the schools changes parents' attitudes. Rather than reduce negative attitudes or teach parents better child management skills, volunteerism may attract parents who have more positive attitudes and more sophisticated child management skills to begin with. The literature does not address itself to this issue of self-selection, however. Another deficiency in the literature on volunteerism is that there is no discussion of the cost-effectiveness of parent volunteer programs. Several other questions, such as those of parent selection, training, and attrition, did not receive special attention. To use parent volunteers in the most effective capacities, educators should place more emphasis on reporting measurable outcomes and on assessing program effects.

Parent-School Communication

Other literature calls for more parental involvement in the form of increased home-school communications. The basic objective is to provide teachers, parents, and/or administrators with information pertaining to the child and to the home or school environment. The most common methods of communication are newsletters (Andrew, 1976) and report cards (Giannangelo, 1975; Leary, 1975). The purpose of such communication is to keep parents informed of school events and of their child's progress in school. Parent-teacher conferences have the advantage of giving teachers information about the child's home life and of affording parents an opportunity to ask questions and to

learn about the teacher's expectations for the child (Goetz, 1975; Carberry, 1975; Carlson & Hillman, 1975; Hill & Carlson, 1975). In parent-teacher-student conferences, the child can presumably see directly and personally that both parents and teachers are concerned about his/her progress and behavior (Hogan, 1975; Freman, 1975). Additional methods for providing information include home visits by school staff (Brooks, 1975); parent questionnaires (Eells, 1974); telephone calls (Kirsch, 1973); taped messages to parents (Bittle, 1975); and orientation meetings, rap sessions, and teas (Wenig & Brown, 1975; Berne, 1973; Evans, 1973).

One outcome measure of home-school communication is the percent of parents attending school events (Wenig & Brown, 1975; Evans, 1973; Greenwood et al., 1972). Anchor and Anchor (1974) found that scheduled parent-teacher conferences were better attended by parents of students exhibiting high success in school than by parents of students low in school success. Other outcome measures are not discussed. For example, Eells (1974) states that "parents <u>will</u> take the time to read printed messages from the school if they are interestingly written and attractively presented," but he does not document that this is in fact so.

The literature on parent-school communication is also deficient on examining the effects of home-school communications. Most school programs seem to view increased home-school communication as an end in and of itself, regardless of its effects on school or home behavior.

There are, however, a few notable exceptions. Studies by Copeland, Brown, Axelrod, and Hall (1972); Fiordaliso, Lordeman, Filipczak, and Friedman (1977), and Parker and McCoy (1977) demonstrated that school attendance could be increased by positive and/or negative feedback to parents. Bittle (1975) assessed the effects on student performance of using a daily recorded telephone message as a communication link between parents and a teacher. He found that by including spelling words on the daily message the children's spelling errors decreased from an average of 35% to an average of 6%. He also found that parents did in fact call the answering device and that compliance with requests of a non-academic nature--to bring in permission letters or refreshment money--was greater when the requests were included on the taped message.

Since communication between home and school already takes place in all schools on at least a limited scale, and since parents have a right to be informed of their child's progress, it seems that this area of parental involvement could particularly benefit from an increased emphasis on measurable outcomes and on assessing program effects. Exploring the effects of different frequencies and kinds of home-school communications could result in a more valuable exchange of information between home and school.

Parent Training/Parent Education

This category of parental involvement has generated a number of research efforts, and consequently it is the most empirical of the

four approaches. One frequent objective of parent training activities is to change the academic and/or social behavior of children by working directly with their parents. This objective can be achieved by teaching parents any number of a wide range of skills, for example, behavior modification techniques (Rose, 1974) or a specific task such as how to implement a home reading program (Niedermeyer, 1973). Parents may be instructed in weekly sessions of an hour to two hours for 5 to 12 weeks (Esterson, Feldman, Krigsman, & Warshaw, 1975; Rose, 1974; Stevens, 1974; Agati & Iovino, 1974; Dinkmeyer, 1973; Boren & Jagodzinski, 1973), in a one-time meeting (Karraker, 1972; Ayllon, Garber, & Pisor, 1975; Niedermeyer, 1973), or through a letter (Karraker, 1972). By working directly with parents, investigators have been able to decrease students' inappropriate behavior (Csapo, 1973; Fairchild, 1976; Ayllon, Garber, & Pisor, 1975; Palmo & Kuzniar, 1972) and to increase academic achievement (Karraker, 1972; Highberger & Brooks, 1973; Love, Kaswan, & Bugental, 1972; Lincoln, Briscoe, & Williams, 1975; Fairchild, 1976). Studies by Taylor and Hoedt (1974) and by Love et al. (1972) both found that working with parents was more effective in reducing classroom behavior problems and in improving grades, respectively, than was counseling directly with the students.

In studies by Csapo (1973), Fairchild (1976), and Ayllon et al. (1975), parents were instructed to reward their children for appropriate school behavior while the desired behaviors were also being rewarded in school. In all three studies the combined home-school interventions resulted in a decrease in students' inappropriate

behaviors. Csapo (1973) also demonstrated that the combined home and school intervention was more effective than either school or home intervention alone.

While the above papers report results in terms of change in students' social and/or academic behaviors, others report outcomes in terms of parent or teacher self-report of change (Rose, 1974; Boren & Jagodzinski, 1973; Donofrio, 1976), parent satisfaction (Agati & Iovino, 1974), and change in parent and student self-concept (Strom & Johnson, 1974). The results of these studies are more difficult to interpret in terms of their relationship to actual student behavior.

The objective of some parent education groups is to help parents deal with the problems of raising a family and of being an effective parent (Knezevich, 1976; Agati & Iovino, 1974; Dinkmeyer, 1973; Dinkmeyer & McCay, 1974). While it is important to mention these groups because they are school-sponsored and presumably provide parents with a link to the school, their main objective is to meet some personal parental needs rather than to specifically involve parents in their children's education.

Some studies in parent education have shown mixed results. Frazier and Mathes (1975), in their assessment of the effects of parent education, concluded that parent education programs have an effect on parent ideas but not on the behavior of the children. Esterson et al. (1975) reported that students whose parents participated in group counseling dealing with familial and marital problems made a mean gain in reading of 1.2 years, while the mean gain for an

untreated group was .8 years. Both groups gained a mean of 1.1 years in math. In a study by Stevens (1974), no significant differences were found between a control group and a group of pre-school children whose parents participated in a program in which they learned to use toys in learning activities with their children.

The literature on parent training as it applies to parental involvement in the schools is weakest in discussing issues of cost-effectiveness, self-selection, and problems of eliciting parent participation. One exception is the Niedermeyer study (1973), in which it was found that by offering transportation to the parent training meeting, approximately 25% more parents could be trained than if transportation were not offered. Niedermeyer also found that by individually training parents at school, training parents at home, and by having parents sign their children's completed work material the level of parent participation was increased.

It is interesting to note that parent training activities are the only area of parental involvement in the schools to which contributions are frequently made from another discipline, in this case psychology (Boren & Jagodzinski, 1973, Ayllon et al., 1975; Love, 1972; Taylor & Hoedt, 1974). The field of psychology contains a large body of research studies on parent training (see, for example, Mira, 1970; Kifer, Lewis, Green, & Phillips, 1974; Reiter, & Kilman, 1975; Rinn, Vernon, & Wise, 1975; Weaters, & Leberman, 1975; Boren, & Jagodzinski, 1975; Peine, 1973), and it is perhaps partly for this

reason that this area includes such a wide diversity of programs with more concrete outcomes than any other area.

Policy Making

For other educators, parental involvement means that parents should be involved at all levels of the school, particularly in policy making. Pellegrino (1973) states that frequently the only time parents participate in making decisions about school policies is in time of school crisis when fast decisions need to be made. He points out that decentralization and the demand for accountability are contributing to the increased involvement of parents and the community in "educational planning, decision-making, and school goverance." The literature cites three ways parents may be involved in decision making: (a) formulating policy (Pellegrino, 1973; Barrington & Marshal, 1975; Pavlick, 1977; Black, 1974), (b) implementing policy (Schmuck, 1974; Schram, 1975; Kimmel, 1976), and (c) acting as a watchdog on policy decisions (Moore, 1973; Lincoln, 1976).

In a major study in this area, Schmuck (1974) suggests that joint decision making by teachers, parents, administrators, and students "will result in changed relations within classrooms" which "will lead to greater attractiveness between teachers and students, reduced absenteeism on the part of both, and an acceleration in the use of participative classroom methods." Filipczak (1973) and Armer, Yeargan, and Hannah (1977) suggest that when parents are involved in the decision making they will more strongly ally themselves with school programs

and help gather community support. On the other hand, Barrington and Marshall (1975), in their article on participative decision making, caution that the assumption that "by broadening the base of decision making change is more likely to take place, and the rate of change... will be speeded up" may not be valid. Rather, the status quo may be maintained. The actual effects of increased parental involvement in policy making, however, are as yet not substantiated in the literature. This approach to involvement is the least documented of all approaches, and it requires further investigation.

Discussion

There is no shortage of ideas about ways in which to involve parents in schools. There appears to be virtually unanimous agreement that the increased involvement of parents is a worthwhile goal in and of itself. While the advantages to involvement are claimed to be numerous, the causal linkages between the increased involvement and the subsequent benefits are not often clearly stated. Further, the specific outcomes to be attained are rarely stated in terms that lend themselves to careful measurement, and with the exception of a group of studies in the field of parent training there is a noticeable lack of data on the effects of increased parental involvement in schools.

If the efforts of educators to involve parents in schools more regularly are to have a high payoff, then considerably more attention needs to be paid to evaluation of these efforts. This should begin with a clear statement of the causal linkages that are posited to

exist. It should include a very specific statement of objectives that lends itself to accurate measurement. The precise procedures to be used should be specified, as well as the characteristics of the parent and student populations being served. If this is done, then it will become possible not only to answer global questions about the general effectiveness of parental involvement programs, but also to identify those activities and procedures that are most effective in achieving particular objectives with certain populations.

Until such time as greater attention is paid to these needs, it is unlikely that the potential benefits of increased parental involvement in schools for parents, students, and schools will be realized. A further risk is that unless there is careful development, evaluation, and dissemination of such programs, there will be a proliferation of programs with vague objectives and untested assumptions that will not succeed and only lead to greater disenchantment of school personnel and parents with each other.

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